

THE PAINTER'S ENVIRONMENT:
PAINTINGS USING COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENTS OF
THREE LATE GENRE SCENES BY PETER BRUEGEL

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by
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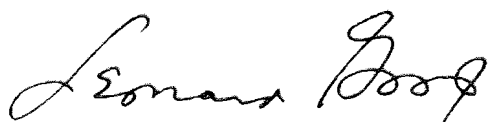
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Approved by Committee:


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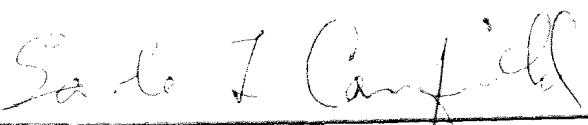

Dean of the Graduate Division

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CHAPTER I

THE PROJECT: OBJECTIVES AND METHOD OF PROCEDURE

As young children look to their parents for guidance, countless artists searching for their own best means of expression have studied the work of past masters. In the same manner, the writer was drawn to appreciate Peter Bruegel's paintings, choosing three, "The Wedding Dance" (1566), at the Detroit Institute of Art, "The Peasant Dance" (1568), and "The Peasant Wedding" (1568),¹ both in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, for careful study. The four paintings produced by the writer as a result of this study will be the subjects of the following report.

I. THE PROJECT

Objectives. This study was prepared for the purpose of understanding major compositional principles of Bruegel's paintings for use as a formal point of departure in a series of four paintings. Also in the paintings, the writer attempted to show technical competence and originality in the area of figural painting and natural

¹Fritz Grossman, "Peter Bruegel," Encyclopedia of World Art (London: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, Limited, 1960), II, 635.

perspective.

Importance of the study. To better understand his or her own art and to help develop an aesthetic sensitivity to the best and most mature work of a Master, the writer feels 1) that the Fine Arts student in the University curriculum should have a vivid sense of the ideas and circumstances under which a great art develops and 2) that, for the true experience, the art should, of course, be studied firsthand. It is evident that one's efforts to enhance his sensitivity to great paintings will suggest to him new directions and possibilities, not only philosophically, but also in the treatment of form, color, and the organization of space.

II. BRUEGEL'S INFLUENCE

Later genre paintings. The choice of Bruegel's paintings for study and inspiration was, quite normally, made for personal and aesthetic reasons as well as in recognition of the Netherlandish artist's stature in the course of art history. The writer, as is usually the case, was guided in choice partly by empathy for the formal style and also the message conveyed by Peter Bruegel's later paintings.

Paintings belonging to Bruegel's late period, 1566 to 1569, have been selected also in order to illustrate the highest development of his art. The later paintings, according to Helen Gardner's Art Through the Ages, represent Bruegel's best handling of forms, larger scale figures and great beauty of rhythm.¹ Hulin deLoo, the noted scholar and biographer, wrote that Bruegel's later work is characterized by "a concentration of the composition without distracting episodes, a tendency toward unity of action."² His later compositions are first viewed in total, then each part of the whole is viewed sequentially, instead of the reverse, as in his earlier work. This trend parallels the transition to optical unity begun in the early Renaissance and culminating in the Baroque period.

Further, there is an interesting similarity between the closed forms, optical clarity and certain flatness of form in the paintings of Bruegel and the manner of painting that Max Kozloff noted as having followed Abstract Expressionism in the 1960's. Although the reasons will not be

¹Helen Gardner, Art Through the Ages (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 4th edition revised by Sumner McK. Crosby, 1959), p. 384.

²Grossman, op cit., p. 643.

³Max Kozloff, "The New American Painting," The New American Art ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Collier Books, 1967, pp. 90-91.

speculated upon in this report, the similarity may be more than mechanical.

Nevertheless, because he drew from life (naer't het leven), a technique introduced by Leonardo and Durer,¹ Bruegel's forms are lively and very inventive. The vitality and rhythm which pervade his compositions, as well as his unique treatment of solid volumes, initially the elements attractive to the writer, motivated further study of Bruegel's life, his view of the world, his genesis as an artist, his tradition, his legacy.

Biographical data. Because this study was not made to add data to Bruegel's biography, certain aspects of his biography are irrelevant, but some facts must be mentioned concerning Bruegel's career as an artist. Biographical details of Bruegel's early life are scanty.² Moreover, art historians are in disagreement on evidence concerning this portion of the artist's life.³ The most revealing documents of his career are the drawings and paintings and their accompanying inscriptions. Data which is generally

¹Robert L. Delevoy, Bruegel: Historical and Critical Study, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Switzerland: D'Art Albert Skira, 1959), p. 53.

²Ibid., pp. 13-14.

³Ibid.

agreed upon, however, can be mentioned here.

Peter Bruegel the Elder is believed to have been born in 1525 in the neighborhood of Breda, Belgium.¹ Documents show his admittance to the Guild of St. Luke in 1551 in Antwerp, then a major trade center and art mecca.²

During 1553 Bruegel made a journey to Italy, as testified by a great number of signed and dated drawings and miniature paintings of the Italian landscape, evidences of which later appeared in his genre work.³ These drawings reflect Bruegel's evolution toward universalism, a Renaissance concept, which meant an attempt to encompass in a single work all the fields of human knowledge.⁴

Bruegel's time spent in Italy was while he was supposedly apprenticed to Hieronymus (Jerome) Cock, the engraver. Bruegel returned to Antwerp at the end of 1553 and spent the next four or five years designing for engravings under Cock. During these years, Bruegel produced didactic works using literary themes; in these Biblical themes and Netherlandish proverbs he began to solve problems

¹Ibid., pp. 7-13

²Ibid., pp. 15-16.

³Ibid., pp. 19-21.

⁴Ibid., p. 33.

of large scaled, highly complex compositions.¹ His style often resembled Bosch's fantasies.

In 1563, Bruegel left the financially declining city of Antwerp and went to Brussels, where he married Mayken Coeck, the daughter of Pieter Coeck, Bruegel's first teacher.² Bruegel's two sons, Pieter the Younger and Jan, became noted painters.³

In summary, according to Ernst Scheyer, Bruegel's art developed from the Late Gothic demonism of such paintings as "Dulle Griet" and "The Battle of Carnival and Lent" to a Renaissance humanism which accords dignity and monumentality to form and therefore to his characters. The unity of content and form in his last years of painting is impressive.⁴

Resurgence of popularity. Immediately after Bruegel's death in Brussels in 1569, his work was even more

¹H. Arthur Klein and Mina C. Klein, Peter Bruegel the Elder: Artist of Abundance (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968), p. 80.

²Ibid., p. 127.

³Ibid., p. 22.

⁴Ernst Scheyer, "The Wedding Dance by Peter Bruegel the Elder: Its Relation and Derivations," Art Quarterly, XXVIII, Number 3, (1965), 167.

sought after than during his considerably successful life. His popularity and wide emulation during and immediately after his lifetime was due largely to his subject matter: scenes of everyday life, illustrations of folk sayings and legends. The drawings and paintings suffered a lapse of popularity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ In the beginning of the twentieth century, however, Bruegel received new attention, this time as a European painter, rather than just as a Flemish artist. Increased attention was given to iconographical interpretation. Since then, the formal aspects of his art have been more carefully examined by art historians.

III. METHOD OF PROCEDURE

Theories of Composition. Using library facilities at the University of Chicago and the Art Institute of Chicago, findings of scholars concerning Bruegel's style were noted in the three paintings chosen for study:

1. Heinrich Wölfflin:

- a. Bruegel's work is closer to Renaissance conventions, for the following reasons:

¹Gustav Gluck, Peter Bruegel the Elder: The Paintings, trans. Eveline Bryan Shaw (New York: The Art Book Publications, 1937), p. 20.

1. There is multiple unity, even though compositions yield a dominant motif.
 2. Color forms a mutual balance of pure opposition.
 3. Linear style (as opposed to painterly) usually dominates.
 4. Forms are clearly delineated rather than partly or wholly obscured by shadows.¹
- b. Following Mannerist conventions, the main event is seen as an incident in the middle ground.²
 - c. Recession into depth occurs on a diagonal plane and is strongly reinforced by objects moving in the direction of recession and/or by contrast of the size of diminishing objects.³

2. Otto Benesch:

- a. Bruegel used "masks" on his figures; their faces lack "detailed and descriptive psychology," combined with partial or total covering of the faces or with backs turned.⁴
- b. Bruegel made repeated use of disks; Benesch linked this with the "enigma and inscrutability of simple medieval forms."⁵

¹Heinrich Wölfflin, Principles of Art History (New York: Dover Publications, 7th ed., 1929), p. 175.

²Ibid., p. 220.

³Ibid., pp. 89-90.

⁴Otto Benesch, The Art of the Renaissance in Northern Europe: Its Relation to the Contemporary Spiritual and Intellectual Movements (London: Phaidon, 1965), pp. 108-110.

⁵Ibid.

- c. Bruegel presented the world as a mechanical organism.¹

3. Fritz Grossmann;

- a. Bruegel achieved more unity of figures and landscape in his later compositions.²
- b. There is a feeling of movement, rotation, pivoting on a central object in Bruegel's compositions.³
- c. In the late genre paintings, the large central character⁴ or characters represent all mankind.⁴
- d. There is a feeling of forward movement, of bursting volume.⁵
- e. "His spatial, linear, and color organization are an integral part of the meaning of his picture as well as the narrative action of the figure."⁶
- f. There is a disparity between the treatment of man and nature. Nature is treated more organically; figures are more stylized, mechanized, geometrical.⁷

¹Ibid.

²Fritz Grossman, "Peter Bruegel," Encyclopedia of World Art, 643.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 645.

⁶Ibid., 640.

⁷Ibid., 647.

- g. The "anonymity" of Bruegel's figures is a result of covering or generalizing forms or changing to abstract forms.¹

4. Edward Michel (on Bruegel's late genre)²

- a. There is greater restraint, less grotesque appearance.
- b. Compositions are better integrated in terms of light.
- c. There are more broken contours because of light refraction.
- d. The composition depends less on linear pattern and the express use of darks and lights.
- e. Compositions are less crowded and confused.
- f. There is full chiaroscuro.

5. Ludwig Muns (on draftsmanship)

- a. Bruegel used luminous spots to create rhythm. In paintings, he used small areas of bright whites and luminous reds.³

¹Ibid.

²Hester Robinson, Peter Bruegel and His Genesis as a Painter of Genre, (Thesis, University of Chicago, 1932), pp. 9-22.

Miss Robinson's thesis provided a translation of Edward Michel's Bruegel (Paris: Les Edition G. Crès, et Compagnie, 1931).

³Ludwig Muns, The Drawings of Peter Bruegel, trans. Luke Herman (London: Phaidon, 1961), p. 90.

6. Charles DeTolnay

- a. Figures seem to unfold toward the earth.¹
- b. Clothing is more than costume; it seems an extension of the skin.²
- c. There is generally a lack of facial expression.³

7. Gustav Gluck

- a. Bruegel simplified the construction of form in two-dimension.⁴
- b. Landscapes have an atmospheric quality.⁵

8. Robert Delevoy

- a. Bruegel used the unique approach he referred to as "near't het leven," or "drawn from life" resulting in significant exploration of form.⁶

¹Charles DeTolnay, The Drawings of Peter Bruegel the Elder, trans. Charles H. Sluth (New York: Twin Editions, 1959), p. 35.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Gustav Gluck, Peter Bruegel the Elder: The Paintings, p. 14.

⁵Ibid., p. 21.

⁶Robert L. Delevoy, Bruegel: Historical and Critical Study, p. 53.

9. Max Friedlander

- a. In groups of figures, the momentum of the whole is emphasized rather than details.¹
- b. His weakened modeling intensified the silhouetted effect.²
- c. Bruegel aimed at overall originality of both motif and setting.³
- d. Bruegel sacrificed the characteristic Flemish love of detail for mastery of overall relationships.⁴
- e. "His primitive and positive use of local colors lends the pictures superficial archaism and popular robustness."⁵
- f. Figures "are generally squat, are seen from above in foreshortening, are broad and clumsy looking, yet agile," and are "coiled together in endless diversity of outlines not in any way recalling the erect, proud nude academic figure."⁶
- g. Bruegel had more interest in the physical than the psychological side of the figures, in the type rather than in the

¹Max Friedlander, From Van Eyck to Bruegel, trans. Marguerite Kay (London: Phaidon Press, 1956), p. 40.

²Ibid., p. 138.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 139.

individual.¹

- h. Bruegel was the first to eliminate the echo of religious solemnity from art.²

Analysis of the "Wedding" paintings. Of the three paintings of Bruegel's chosen for study in depth, "The Wedding Feast" and "The Peasant Wedding" were studied from reproductions and "The Wedding Dance" was viewed at the Detroit Institute of Art. Conclusions about style, color and iconography offered by art historians proved helpful in the writer's study, although it might be mentioned that he is seldom treated as a technician, as he deserves.

Formal analysis included making a) value studies (Figures 1, 2, and 3) which reduce color areas in the paintings to values of light, medium and dark gray, and b) diagrams (Figures 4, 5, and 6) showing the few overall geometric forms to which all lesser forms are subordinated. This procedure is highly recommended for the learning and teaching of composition.

Selection of elements for project. The writer

¹Ibid., p. 140.

²Ibid.



Figure 1. Simplified value study of "The Peasant Wedding" showing dominant patterns of dark, medium and light.



Figure 2. Simplified value study of "The Wedding Feast" showing dominant patterns of dark, medium and light.



Figure 3. Simplified value study of "The Wedding Dance" showing dominant patterns of dark, medium and light.

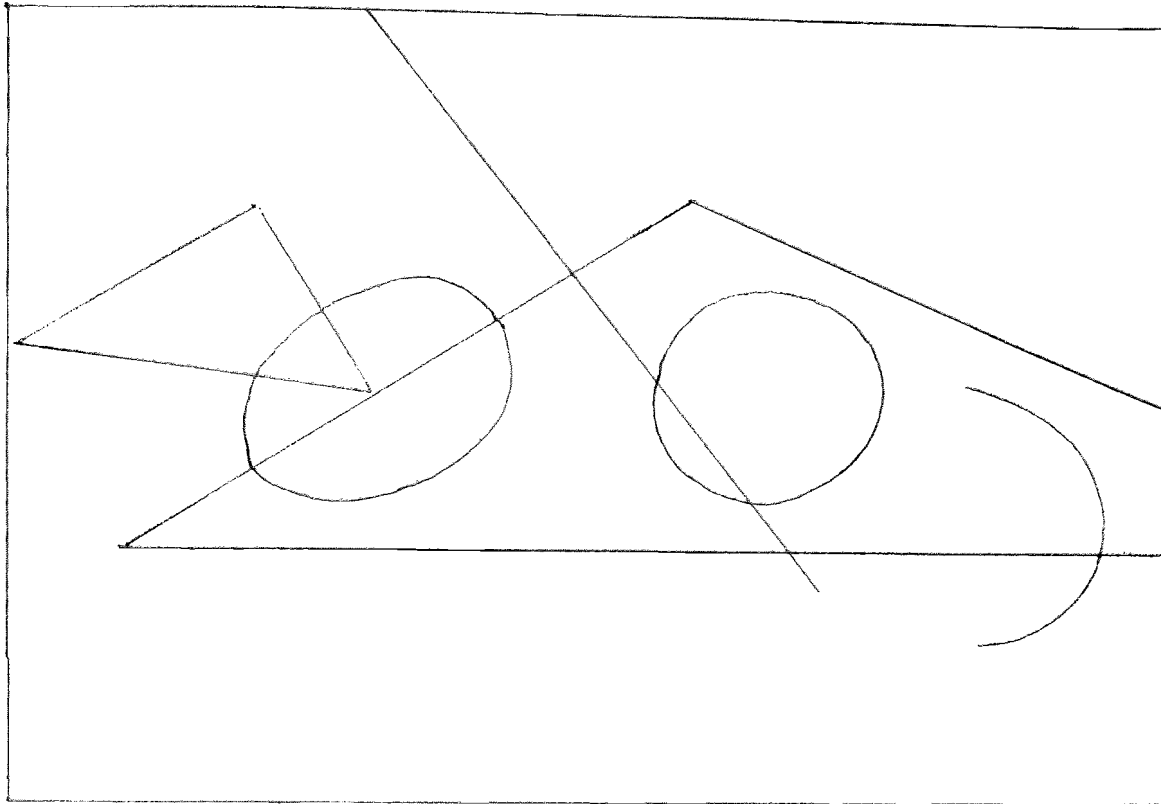


Figure 4. Line drawing showing dominant geometric forms in "The Peasant Wedding"

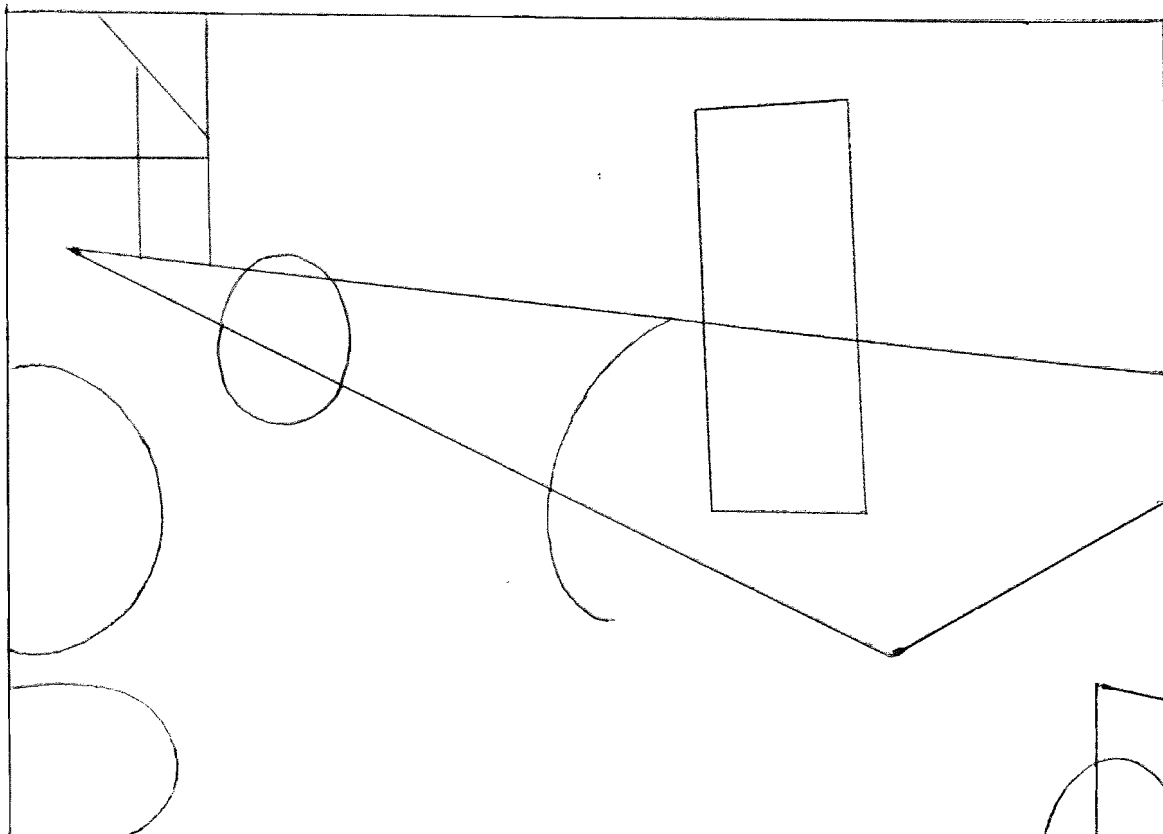


Figure 5. Line drawing showing dominant geometric forms in "The Wedding Feast."

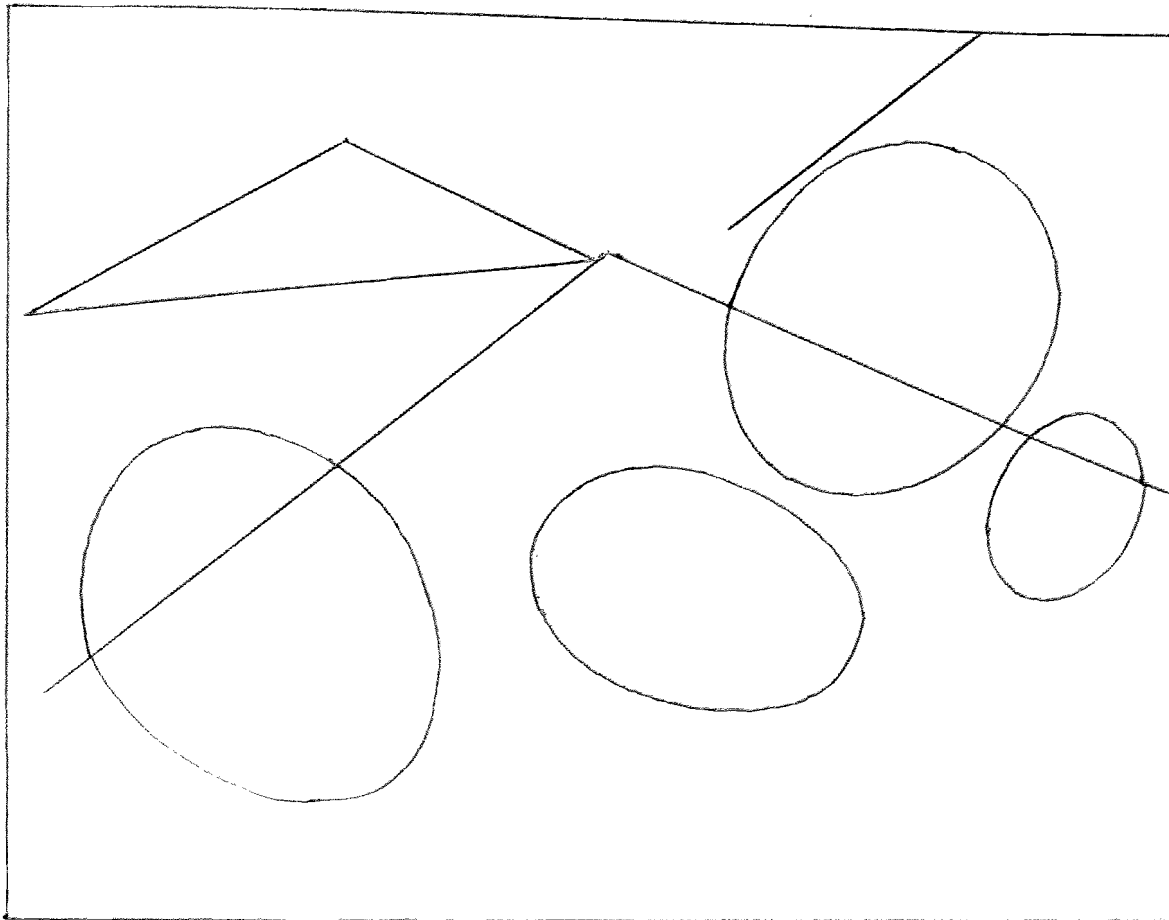


Figure 6. Line drawing showing dominant geometric forms in "The Wedding Dance."

became particularly interested in experimenting with the following elements found in Bruegel's work:

1. Closed space (a self-contained environment).
2. Diagonals, although not necessarily to give the illusion of depth.
3. A usually complementary (red and green) color scheme.
4. Flatness of form, reinforced by spare use of modeling and by well defined edges.

Although a number of other elements were experimented with in the project, the above mentioned were used most consistently.

Format and limits of project. Four paintings, each four feet square, were planned. These were painted in acrylics, in the manner of oil painting, on stretched, pre-sized, cotton canvas. Each is discussed in some depth in Chapter Two of this report.

The general theme, "The Painter's Environment," was assigned to the paintings. It was expected that the project would be extended over a period of time -- actually, two years and three States. It is felt that a more specific theme, such as the Four Seasons, could not have been sustained for such a period.

CHAPTER II

THE AUTHOR'S PAINTINGS:

DESCRIPTION, EVALUATION AND RELATED THOUGHTS

I. "CHICAGO: LATE AUGUST" (1969)

Method of Development. Upon moving to Chicago's South Side from Des Moines' relatively rural scenery, the writer was strongly impressed with the change of environment. For instance, Des Moines' sky is startlingly blue, often clear, and colors in general seemed exaggeratedly brighter to the writer. In South Shore (Chicago) by contrast, houses, sidewalks and trees are tinged by coal dust and residue from the southside steel industry. Stench rolls in regularly each evening, particularly in warm weather, from the Stockyards. There is an ubiquitous sense of increasing discontent and its concomitant, crime. The writer chose for her subject a spot least touched by these conditions, nevertheless the colors refer to both the conditions and the late Summer season.

As can be seen (Figure 7), "Chicago" is a garden-scape seen from a low viewpoint. In the foreground are foliage and a child's ball. A wall on the left separates the foreground from a housetop and a man watering with a



Figure 7. Black and white photograph of "Chicago: Late August."

garden hose. The middle ground on the right is filled with grass-like underbrush and a tall tree. Everything is faded in color and somewhat limp in form, as nature becomes after weathering summer sun. Here, as in Bruegel's "Hunting in Winter" and "The Harvest," landscape is of primary interest and human activity is secondary.

Procedure. A pencil drawing, an oil pastel sketch and a small watercolor sketch were combined and the resulting drawing was covered with a line grid to correspond to the one drawn on the canvas to facilitate enlargement and transfer. Light washes of acrylic were applied to large areas and later were mostly covered by opaque layers of paint.

Colors were reworked and subordinated to a unified scheme. The colored outlines which developed are of two kinds: those drawn on with a brush, as in the lower right corner, and those which were the outer edges of previous coats of paint, as in the lower left and upper right areas. The latter type, which shall be referred to as "undercoat outline," is used extensively here and in the other paintings.

This painting, as well as the others in the project,

was finished with one coat of polymer gloss medium.

Composition. Because Bruegel's illusion of space served as a guide for the project, the author tried to develop a "repoussoir," a movement of the eye, by means of the arrangement of forms, from the foreground to the background. This movement follows a path from the lower left through the center of the painting to the man in the middle ground. From there, the eye tends to stay in the middle ground as the right hand tree is scanned.

"Chicago" comes close to being a formally balanced composition, almost too bilaterally symmetrical, although it has enough variety to sustain interest. Although the choice of square canvases was purely arbitrary and the experience was undoubtedly valuable to the writer, such proportions created a special type of compositional problem. The solution in this case consisted of varying the items on either side of an imaginary vertical center line to create an informal balance. Other solutions are seen in subsequent paintings.

Form. The sometimes limp, ambiguously shaped forms in "Chicago" were derived from the interesting outlines in a preliminary drawing for the painting. The massed forms of stems and leaves had outlines more engaging than the

objects or their details. Furthermore, the branches of leaves seen against the light sky appeared to be silhouetted organic forms, without much tonal variation. In the drawing as well as in the painting, plants seem to congeal, rather than to grow. They were painted as flat pattern. In some places, the outlines are harsh and confining, especially in the lower left and upper right corners. There is no particular reason for this, however; the painting just grew that way.

Color. Perhaps even more than form, color is an expressive element in this painting. The South side of Chicago at the end of Summer smells, looks and feels oppressive, even though, as this picture shows, its inhabitants try to make garden spots. The sulphur dioxide count soars and nature, both vegetable and animal, seems to fade and droop.

"Chicago"'s colors are green-greys, greyed pastels, dull mauve, faded vermillion; even the sky is dull yellow. Because color is applied in flatly even areas, like house paint, separated by thin lines of color -- bright blue, dark green, reddish brown -- the subtle effects of closely related tones are emphasized.

The relationship of a pair of complementaries, red and green, has been the object of some fascination to the writer. The possibilities for variety within this limited range of red and green with an admixture of earth colors have comprised the basic color harmony of other paintings in this project. This choice of color was based partly on personal preference and partly on observing Bruegel's use of color, but instead of imitating Bruegel's repeated use of bright red and deep green to lead the eye through the composition, then, a subdued version of this color counterpoint was used. For instance, the foliage was modified into a variety of dull greens and was complemented by the cadmium red ball, which was dulled with an admixture of green and yellow ochre.

In addition to the colors which suggest late Summer -- golds and brass greens -- a number of pastel tones (colors mixed with white or light grey) were used. It might be noted that Bruegel's "Wedding Dance" displays many soft pastels -- salmon, grey-blue, light green -- among its dominant harmony of red and green.

A color experiment. The many subtle neutral and pastel tones seen in Bruegel's "Wedding Dance" suggested a color experiment in "Chicago." The writer wished to paint

light colors very close in value and adjacent to one another, as in the upper left quadrant of "Chicago," where the house, tree and sky are painted in flat style, without lines separating each color area. Here all the colors are very light, almost equal in value. But in acrylics, this presented a technical problem. Because the colors tended to dry darker than when applied to the canvas, some relationships had to be reworked until a harmony was achieved. For example, the yellow-grey sky has three close tones approximately equal in value. The writer did not try to imitate a phenomenon of nature but to sustain visual interest in the sky, with a minimum of contrasting values. In "Chicago" and in subsequent paintings the problem of controlling color values was alleviated by substituting gesso for titanium white to make tints. This way, the colors tended to remain the same when dry, or to dry slightly lighter, and generally values were easier to control. It should be noted, however, that the abrasive particles in gesso tend to wear out paint brushes more quickly than do pigments.

II. "THE UNDER-ACHIEVERS" (1969-1970)

Method of development. "The Under-Achievers" is an interior scene with figures. One figure is slumped



Figure 8. Black and white photograph of "The Under-Achievers."

over on a couch, facing the viewer. Another figure holding a flower sits on the floor, leaning against the couch. They face a portable television set. Behind them in a doorway opening to the right is a repetition of the TV with a pair of figures, merged into a single form, which is shown on the screen. The figures on the couch are flanked by potted plants. In the foreground are a dress form, the TV, a vacuum cleaner and a table top with a container of artist's brushes. Painted in Chicago, the work merited First Prize in the Fifth Regional Art Exhibition, 1971, in Phoenix, and appeared in the First Biennial Four Corners States Exhibition, 1971, in Phoenix.

The method of development, unique in this project, was of much value to the writer as an experiment. The subject matter and theme which gradually developed from it resulted from the following:

1. Pen and ink sketches of household objects, a newsmagazine photo and some "remembered" objects were made. These were cut out and assembled on a 16" square board.
2. Values of light, medium and dark grey were inserted in the negative spaces.
3. The monochromatic design was covered with an

acetate sheet on which a grid had been drawn.

A corresponding grid was drawn on the canvas for enlargement and transfer.

The collage of drawings became a personal statement which took on more meaning as the design became a painting.

The theme. Although the writer's aim was to borrow from Bruegel's designs rather than his themes, "The Under-Achievers" principal affinity to Bruegel's work is that it states the human condition and indirectly makes a social comment: television watching can be compared to drugs or alcohol when it is used to provide a temporary escape from one's purposeful duties. On the other hand, however, each person, subjectively speaking, is an under-achiever; no one is ever as accomplished as he would like, and this discontent helps to spur him on to better things. So although the theme is universal, this painting illustrates the aspect of individual irresponsibility.

Bruegel's themes were often based on the principle that man is interdependent with his environment and all of nature operate as a single organism. In "The Under-Achievers" man seems to have sunk to a new low; instead of glutting himself with food and drink and sensual delights, he becomes entirely absorbed in the TV image. It is

unavoidably true that here, as in Samuel Beckett's novel situations, a man's lack of action constitutes his decision to not-act. So whether he acts or not, he cannot escape, except temporarily, responsibility for himself. And since Bruegel's idea of nature's interdependence is more evident today than it was then, man's responsibility for action or non-action is crucial.

The theme of indolence provided an interesting starting point. It is less explicit than in Bruegel's pictures, perhaps because formalism is so much more important today. In "The Under-Achievers," color, form and composition are of great consideration. Actually, the theme gradually became more clear to the painter as work progressed, as if the choices had been subconscious. To the author and perhaps to others, the dress form, vacuum and paint brushes represent daily or at least regular activities which must be repeated over and over, all for different reasons and never ending. The presence of these objects seems to reproach the figures as they sit immobilized in front of the lighted screen. Too, the question of whether TV is a faithful reflection of life, or vice versa, is implicit.

Composition. Forms are disposed in a quasi-perspectival arrangement, with larger, brighter, more detailed objects in the foreground overlapping successively smaller, less detailed, duller colored ones in the middle ground and background. But they are arranged within a rectilinear "grid" that reaffirms the surface of the picture and somewhat diminishes the illusion of perspective.

This grid is made of a vertical line about three fifths of the distance to the right edge, a horizontal line marked by the top edge of the couch and the (background) television set (eight inches from the top of the canvas) and two diagonals made by the large table and (foreground) television set.

The use of a natural looking visual perspective is in the manner of Bruegel. But while the diagonals in his "Wedding Feast" table and of the central wedge of the "Wedding Dance" serve to reinforce the illusion of perspective, in the writer's painting the diagonals simply counteract the severe vertical-horizontal grid.

Form. Both geometric and organic forms appear in this painting. Because the writer has been impressed with the modern British painter, Francis Bacon, whose work features

highly organic and extremely distorted figures confined in geometric, cell-like environments, "The Under-Achievers" borrowed this element of his work. Other Bacon-like elements include:

1. Distortion of figures, particularly the faces.
2. Slight tilting forward of the ground plane, giving an unreal quality without entirely destroying equilibrium. This device provided the writer with the means to develop a slightly enlarged fore- and middle-ground with objects seen as if from a rather high eye level.
3. Mood of pessimism. The writer developed a blacker outlook than Bruegel, although considerably less anguished despair than Bacon.

It is evident that the writer did not include burgeoning, geometricized forms in the manner of Bruegel, but turned to those of a highly influential modern painter, Francis Bacon.

Color. There is greater variety of color, as well as more value contrast, in "The Under-Achievers" than in "Chicago." Salmon, dull green and yellow predominate but mauve, blue-grey, yellow-green and light vermillion are

included. As in the other paintings, a variation of Bruegel's red-green combination was used; this time it is peach and light green (composed of yellow ochre, hooker's green, green earth and red oxide).

Much of the color is applied in flat areas but on some panels of the dress form a painterly style was used. In addition, more glazes (color plus medium) were used to build up unusual color effects, particularly in the Levis of the figure on the couch. These are blue-grey, with a little lavender and have a Terborchian iridescence. The clothlike pink form at the left of the couch was treated similarly. Generally, flat color was used against texture to set it off effectively.

There are many undercoat lines, as there are in "Chicago." They are usually neutral and darker than the color areas they bound, and serve to make the juxtaposed colors look brighter. Too, patches of undercoat color were left to show, both on the couch and on the shirt of the seated figure. Lines on the potted plants were, for the most part, drawn on, however.

Color in "The Under-Achievers" is usually unnatural to the object it depicts, i.e., the grey and lavender TV set

and the pastel tinted brushes. The sickly pallid feet of the figure on the couch contrasts unnaturally with the dark grey-brown face and hands. Even though the plants are relatively natural green, the total coloristic effect is surreal, suggesting that the scene is imaginative and symbolic.

Another coloristic effect, the lack of cast shadows in most of "The Under-Achievers," serves to crystallize objects into semi-symbols. The device was borrowed from Bruegel, as for example, in the "Wedding Feast," in which light from the front left would normally cast shadows next to clearly delineated objects in the foreground. Notice that these shadows are missing. In Bruegel's work, lack of cast shadows serves to accentuate not only the circle and oval motif but also the "object-ness" and symbolic value of the thing depicted. Thus the little boy in the foreground of Bruegel's picture is the very picture of childlike and unrestrained greed. Lack of cast shadow, then, is borrowed from this masterful painting. In the writer's painting, it should be mentioned, the color changes on the table in the foreground are not derived from cast shadows; they are needed to break up a large plain area into smaller, more interesting shapes.

An interesting coloristic effect had to be sacrificed for the sake of the entire tonal harmony; dark areas inside the dress form were originally a deep, mysterious grey, giving it the surreal impression of De Chirico's manikins. But because these dark areas disturbed the predominantly middle to light value scheme, they had to be raised in value.

III. "KITCHEN" (1969-1970)

Method of development. An old, ceramic tiled, high ceilinged, cupboardless, linoleumed, pantried refectory in the writer's student apartment suggested this painting. Produce crates served as temporary storage space but usually jars, cans, boxes and utensils sat out in the open, creating an inevitable clutter that, along with a photo of the painter's husband, suggested a composition.

Procedure. "Kitchen" was less preconceived as a design than "The Under-Achievers." The overall design for the painting was made beforehand but most of the details were worked out directly on canvas. A grid of lines was used, as before, to enlarge the design. Painting preceeded in a clockwise direction, beginning with the lower left corner, and was applied directly, in an Impressionistic manner,



Figure 9. Black and white photograph of "Kitchen."

and without undercoat. Gradual overpainting resulted in more uniform values, usually in the medium range, and a more solid, hard-edge style. Still, "Kitchen" is the most painterly of the series.

Composition. Four rectangles form the composition-
al basis of "Kitchen" (see Figure 10). The figure at the
table repeats the direction of these rectangles. Most of
the objects in the painting take horizontal or vertical di-
rections, with few diagonals. Overlapping objects give an
illusion of distance. Like "The Under-Achievers," this is
a self contained environment, with no allusion to distant
regions, as in Wölfflin's description of the Renaissance
concept of painting as opposed to that of the Baroque era.¹
Here there is simply a matter of fact organization of the
scene from the writer's point of view.

The relationship of "Kitchen" with Bruegel's work is
the diagonal pattern of visual movement. This begins in
the lower left corner and proceeds to the doorway at the up-
per left but also follows the diagonally receding feast
table, from lower right to upper left center. In both

¹Heinrich Wölfflin, Principles of Art History, pp.
124-126.

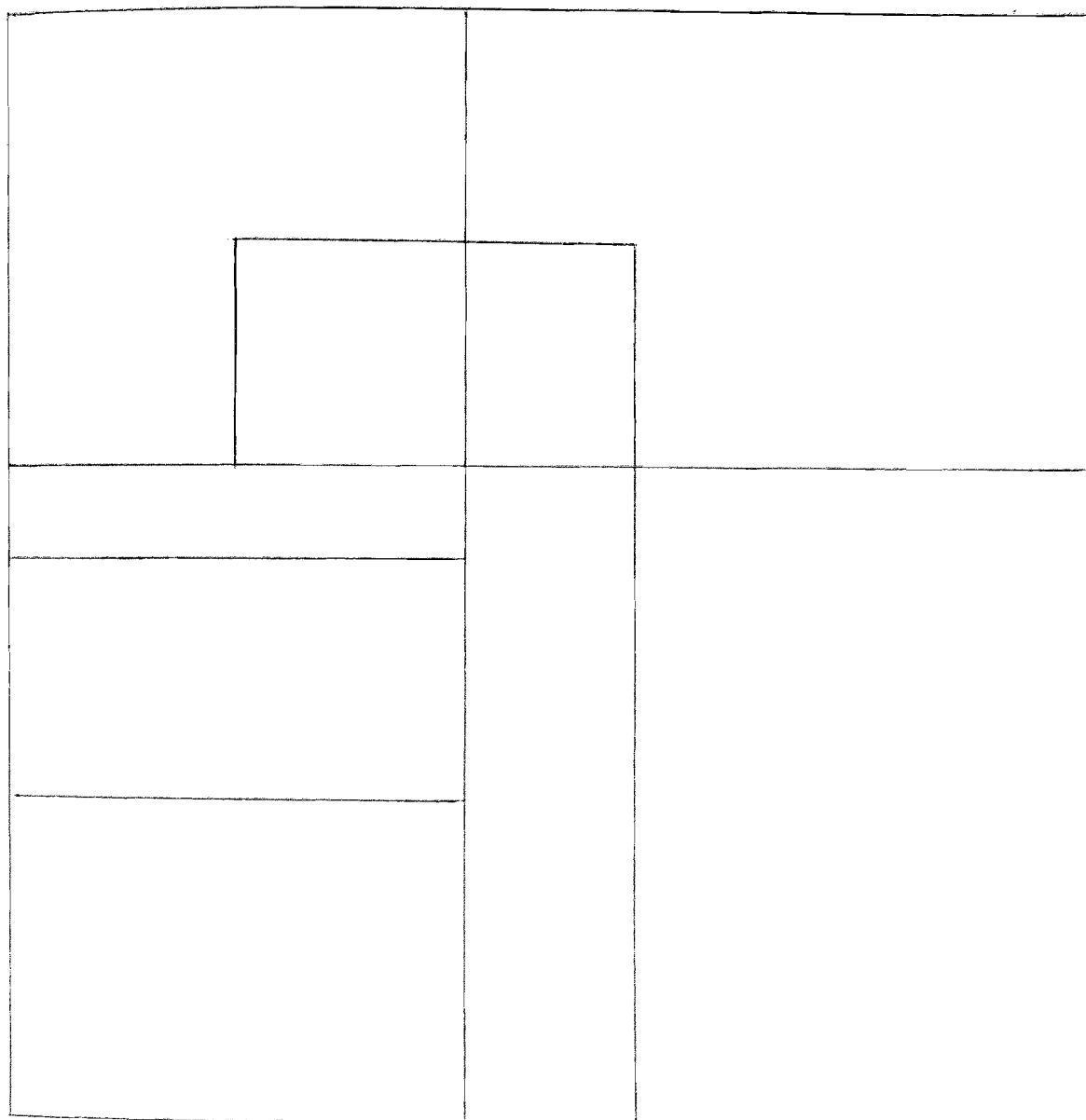


Figure 10. Line drawing showing the structural basis of "Kitchen."

paintings, there is an illusion of depth created by overlapping objects, diminishing sizes of figures and objects, and diminishing color contrast in depth.

Form. Within the rectangular grid of the composition are non-geometric forms. The lights and shadows within the objects were deliberately distorted in order to make unusual and interesting form out of the quite ordinary subject matter.

The forms in general are not in any way related to, or derived from, Bruegel's forms, but the un-classical quality of the figure at the table, apparently unfolding from within, is somewhat similar to Max Friedlander's description of Bruegel's figures (see page 12), except that the writer's figure unfolds in a rectilinear, rather than in a circular, fashion.

The writer gave the figure at the left a certain degree of individuality by making it resemble a specific model, although personality is depicted much less vividly than Bruegel's characters. It is similar to some of Bruegel's characters whose heads are averted to lessen the definition of personality.

In order to direct eye movement in a somewhat

diagonal pattern from lower left to upper right, forms are more precisely painted and are easier to identify in the lower left and are more ambiguous and less precise in other areas.

Color. In "Kitchen," as in the previous paintings, the predominant colors, pink-beige, red oxide and blue green, bronze green and yellow green, were inspired by Bruegel's red and green color scheme in his "Wedding" paintings. Red oxide areas, as well as the brighter green areas, reoccur, leading the eye from lower left, where they are the brightest, to the upper right, where they are greyed by the admixture of grey or a complementary color. It should be noted that Bruegel used uniformly bright spots of red and white to create a rhythmic movement of the eye throughout the picture.

Although the full color range, from warm to cool, has been used here, the value range is very limited, almost entirely to the upper and middle values. A lower value, dark green, in the upper right quadrant reinforces the illusion of greater depth in that area.

In this painting, cast shadows are not completely eliminated. Some of the shadows seen in the photo used

for the central figure are included, indicating a light source on the figure's left. The shadows helped to vary flat surfaces. In addition, the shadow cast by the figure on the wall helps to reinforce the vertical directions in the composition.

A significant amount of glazing was used in "Kitchen." Several coats, predominantly yellow ochre with polymer medium, were applied to nearly all the painting except for the pale mauve and green-grey lower right quadrant. The result, as can be seen, is a golden glow which harmonizes the colors it covers. The use of colored glaze has been observed in studio classes and when used as a shortcut method to avoid reworking individual colors to achieve harmony, its integrity might be questionable. But if it works, what harm? It is not a fool proof shortcut, anyway, nor is it usually effective on very large areas. It seems successful here, perhaps because the yellow glaze covers colors related to itself.

In summary, although it lacks technical polish in certain areas of the still life compositions, "Kitchen" is a relatively original and interesting figural composition.

IV. "SELF PORTRAIT" (1970)

Method of development. The last painting of the series shows a number of still life items on a table in the upper left and a hunched figure, turned away from the still life, sketching at the lower right. There is a flat, wedge shaped area in between. A television set flanks the composition on the left and in the upper right is a conglomerate of flat areas, pipes and a T-square. The figure in the foreground is a self portrait consciously modeled after Bruegel's drawing "Artist and Connoisseur," apparently a self portrait.

"Self Portrait" was originally intended as a still life; the motivation stemmed from a number of household items visually interesting to the writer: plants, a pitcher, a sandal, pipe joints, folds of a sheet, as well as an illustration of a crumbling Roman relief showing a standard bearer, a ruler and a winged man.

Procedure. A grid of eight inch squares was drawn on the canvas with charcoal. The drawing was made directly on the canvas without preliminary sketches. As in the previous painting, transparent washes (pigment plus water) were gradually built up until opacity was achieved. As a



Figure 11. Black and white photograph of "Self Portrait."

result of repeated overpainting, undercoat lines of varying colors developed. In comparing this still life with that in "Kitchen," the draftsmanship is more refined and less distorted from natural forms. The entire painting was covered with a single coat of polymer medium.

Composition. A diagram (Figure 12) shows the rectilinear and diagonal structure of "Self Portrait." Essentially, two large triangular areas, in the upper left and lower right corners, are separated by a large wedge shaped area which recedes to a point near the upper right corner. Two vertical lines dividing the canvas into equal thirds at the top and the horizontal T-square and implied horizontal of the table top at the left stabilize the long diagonal lines. The dominant diagonals and the wedge form were freely borrowed elements of Bruegel's composition in "The Wedding Feast," i.e., the banquet table.

The illusion of perspective in "Self Portrait" is slightly different than the others. In examining the work, some of the usual clues of visual perspective are indicated:

1. Overlapping objects.
2. Distant objects on a higher level.
3. Diminishing size of distant objects.

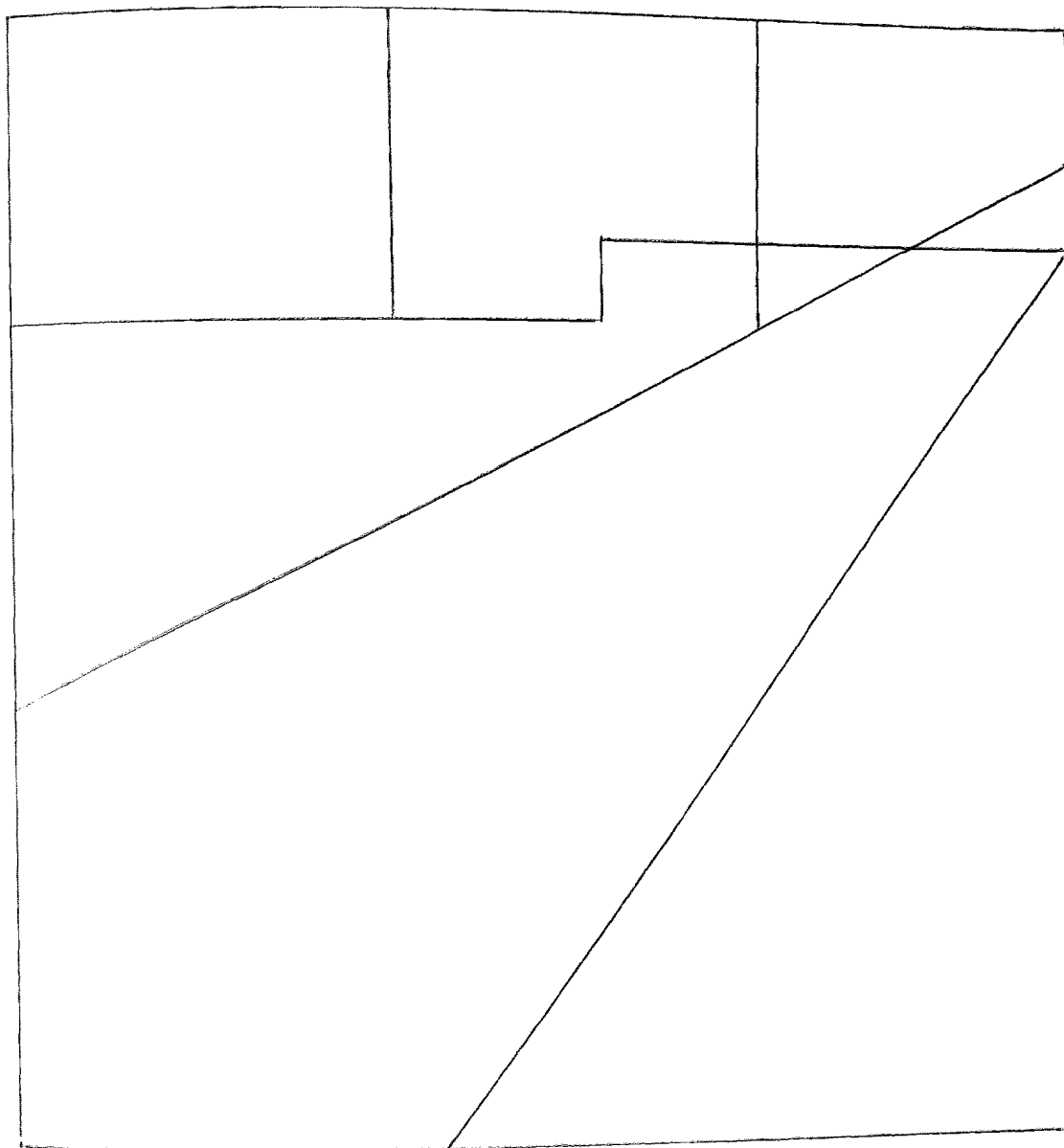


Figure 12. Line drawing showing the structural basis of "Self Portrait."

Other clues seem to contradict ordinary rules of visual perspective:

1. Ordinarily, things are seen in less detail and in less bright color in the distance. Here, the opposite is true.

2. The wedge shaped reddish space gives no specific information about the amount of illusionary distance between the still life and the figure.

3. The flat rectilinear areas overlapped by the still life are large and high in value, making them appear to project, contradicting any illusion of vast depth.

4. Finally, the raised edge of a circular disk suspended above the figure reaffirms the picture's flatness.

Form. Most of the larger forms are rectilinear, contributing to the large, simple overall pattern. Except for the aforementioned inspiration of Bruegel's drawing on this work, there was no specific influence on form. There is relatively little distortion of form, except for the panel of Roman figures in which portions were eliminated and form was reduced to simple outlines on a flat background and also in the face, in which the color changes are rather prominently outlined.

prominently outlined.

Color. Instead of the red and green based colors, as in the previous pictures, there are large amounts of pale blue and neutral beige as well as rust with a strong proportion of Cadmium Red Light, and there is no complementary color scheme of any kind. as there was in the previous paintings. Contrary to the other works, too, there are few earth colors and more clear pastels: salmon pink, cadmium pink and lime yellow. Finally, whereas "Kitchen" has a golden glaze, this work has a silvery grey tonality with yellow glaze only in the upper right corner.

Because of its unnatural perspective, "Self Portrait" is a slightly surreal work and is rather ambiguous. While it probably does not have as wide appeal as, perhaps, "The Under-Achievers," the writer deems it personally successful.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS ON THE PROJECT'S SUCCESS AND FURTHER THOUGHTS ON PAINTING

I. RESTATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Study of Bruegel. The preliminary study of scholarly writing about Peter Bruegel and of a painting ("The Wedding Dance"), reproductions, prints and drawings, revealed that he was severely critical of human folly but had, at the same time, great compassion for mankind. In a technical sense, his genius in narrative depiction and in composition is probably his finest achievement. His work aided and inspired the writer to develop her own style in the painting project.

The painting project. Along with displaying technical competence and originality, this project was undertaken for the purpose of adopting major compositional elements of three of Peter Bruegel's late genre paintings. Some elements used are as follow:

1. Closed space: less methodical spatial illusion and less relieved by glimpses of sky and distant view than in Bruegel's paintings.

2. Diagonals: not used exclusively, as Bruegel

did, but as a color experiment.

4. Flattened form, spare modeling, and well defined edges: even more flattened, less modeling and more clearly outlined than Bruegel's work.

II. CONCLUSIONS

Technical results. The paintings executed for this project are satisfactory, both in a technical and expressive sense. They are, for the most part, however, "tight," or lacking in spontaneity of brush stroke, possibly due to inexperience. Nevertheless, the procedure used in developing this project is highly recommended to the student of painting.

Of the methods of developing a composition in the course of the project, the cut paper value study used in "The Under-Achievers" was most successful. In "Chicago," the substitution of gesso for titanium white to control values of colors is another lesson of the project. Undercoat outlines in all of the paintings, as previously explained, formed interesting color relationships and helped the writer gain experience in estimating the effects of many colors upon each other. Finally, the writer found that the search for form was the primary consideration and

that depiction of a theme was secondary.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION AND STUDY

Topics for study. Some interesting ideas and topics for study, for which time did not permit, were presented during the preparation of this project:

1. The theory of color in Bruegel's paintings might be explored. The "Wedding Dance" shows beautifully translucent color areas. And charcoal drawn outlines are as obvious, in their way, as those of Arshile Gorky's. How was Bruegel's color influenced by his Italian travels?

2. Since the project is based on the premise that our art heritage provides the means, if not the themes, for art today, the problem of derivation by modern painters from earlier artists might be further explored, say, figural painters such as Balthus, Paul Delvaux, Francis Bacon, or Stephen Greene.

Ideas. Besides the tradition of painting in our culture, what is it that prompts the artist to divide and organize a two dimensional surface? Why the urge for self expression in this particular way? To offer a single, relatively permanent solution in a world that is fluctuating and uncertain? Why a search for form in only two dimensions

when art forms assisted by modern technology have pushed aesthetic expression in so many other directions? Will the practice of painting survive? These last questions are fundamental. Solutions found in past paintings no longer necessarily apply to present philosophical and aesthetic problems. The search must continue in order to give way to a better form of expression.

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